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"Mi Pueblo no es del Pueblo":
Buying and Boycotting Culture and Politics in a Latino Supermarket

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"Mi Pueblo no es del Pueblo":
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by

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Abstract

"Mi Pueblo no es del Pueblo": Buying and Boycotting Culture and Politics in a Latino Supermarket

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Taking Mi Pueblo Food Center, a nineteen-store chain in Northern California, as a case study, this report will examine Latino supermarkets as sites of both cultural preservation and community building and of legal vulnerability and instability, particularly for undocumented individuals and their families. Mi Pueblo is family-owned and founded by Juvenal Chavez, once undocumented, whose model minority narrative has become central to the store's public image. It offers a shopping environment that transplants an archetype of a traditional Mexican village marketplace into a contemporary American supermarket, resulting in a combination of cultural nostalgia and modern convenience. Mi Pueblo has successfully engaged crossover markets, and has become a significant resource to Latino/a communities. However, its success has also attracted government suspicion and scrutiny: in 2012, following a mandatory Immigration and Customs Enforcement audit, Mi Pueblo voluntarily participated in the E-Verify program, requiring employees to confirm their employment eligibility and resulting in the loss of 80% of the franchise's employees. This massive turnover spurred widespread protests,

and the switch to fair-wages and documented labor standards led Chavez to file for bankruptcy in 2013.

Focusing on media discourses surrounding the food, theming, and politics of the stores, this report examines Mi Pueblo as a stage for dialogue between the management and protestors about the potential for Latino/a activism, sovereignty, and citizenship within a broader context of contemporary immigration politics and undocumented labor economies. Throughout this research, I draw from news articles, blog posts, protest ephemera, and video footage in order to explore Mi Pueblo as site for politics of consumption, cultural preservation, and reform.

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Illustration 1: Dignity and Resistance Coalition Protest Flyer. November 21st, 2012.

For many United States supermarkets, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving is one of the busiest days of the year. Yet, on November 21st, 2012, the parking lot of Mi Pueblo Food Center's East Oakland store was packed not with cars but with protestors, many of whom were affiliated with the Dignity and Resistance Coalition, a local social justice organization, and many of whom had come to the protest with their children and teenagers, bearing placards with slogans such as "¡Mi Pueblo ya no eres del pueblo!" and "Boycott Mi Pueblo." A number of the placards denounced Juvenal Chavez, the store's founder and owner, as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) collaborator and traitor. The mood, however, was festive. Over the course of the day, the action included a number of performances, including a staged lucha libre match between "the struggling SUPER MERCADO worker" and "Union Busting, ICE collaborating Mi Pueblo Market Owner Juvenal 'El Diablo' Chavez,"[1] a comedic skit in which a loyal customer is admonished for shopping at Mi Pueblo, and a jazz marching band procession[2]. A flyer advertising the protest ventured: "will Black and Brown communities smash corporate profit or will capitalism defeat humanity with Juvenal Chavez's anti-immigrant practices? Will SuperMercado's power of the undocumented worker prove to be Chavez's downfall?" The answer that day from the actors and the protestors was a hopeful and resounding yes.

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[1] "Luchadora vs. Corporate Greed: A Mi Pueblo Market Worker Solidarity Demo". Dignity and Resistance Coalition Protest Flyer, November 21st, 2012. Indybay.org.
(accessed April 30, 2015).

[2] "Boycott Mi Pueblo Food Center", November 22nd, 2012, Youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMuinNP8jRg (accessed April 4, 2015).

In some ways, the protest's celebratory atmosphere, with its festive music and actors in woven dresses and luchador masks, seemed at home at Mi Pueblo, known for its lively and colorful shopping environment, ranchera music, and use of traditional Mexican motifs. Since opening its first store in 1991, the franchise has expanded into nineteen locations, each themed after a different Mexican state, staffed exclusively with bilingual employees, and offering a wide range of Latino brands, as well as fresh produce, meat, and baked goods. Like many Latino grocery chains, with its expansion Mi Pueblo has become much more than a typical supermarket franchise, hosting cultural programs, college scholarship competitions, voter registration events, remittance services, and even its own radio program that, according to its website, "recreates the nostalgia of past times, telling stories, folktales, jokes, and interviews using traditional Mexican music that lives in the hearts of those who one day had the courage to leave their homelands in search of better opportunities in a foreign country."[3] The store is also known for its affordability, in many instances offering a crucial resource for families struggling to make ends meet or who live in areas with few grocery options. Testimonials from shoppers often allude to the store's unique shopping environment, which transplants an archetype of the traditional Mexican village marketplace into a contemporary American supermarket, resulting in a combination of cultural nostalgia and modern convenience. As one news article cryptically announced in 2013, "everything and nothing about the Mi

[3] "Así Es Mi Pueblo", Mi Pueblo Website, http://www.mipueblo.com/mipueblo/comunidad/asi-es-mi-pueblo-2/
(accessed April 7, 2015).

Pueblo supermarket in east San Jose reminds [customer] Alma Colon of grocery shopping back home."[4]

Despite the store's outward dedication to supporting Latino immigrant communities and cultural identities, according to the November 21st protestors, owner Juvenal Chavez "no es del pueblo."[5] In 2012, Mi Pueblo was subjected to a mandatory ICE I-9 audit, often called a "silent raid". Chavez, once undocumented himself, came under serious scrutiny for Mi Pueblo's subsequent adoption of E-Verify, an ICE program that requires employees to confirm their employment eligibility and eventually resulted in the loss of 80% of the company's employees.[6] This massive turnover and switch to fair-wage, documented labor standards led Chavez to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2013 and spurred widespread outcry, protests, and boycotts among former Mi Pueblo employees and customers.

Taking the Mi Pueblo supermarket franchise as a case study, I will examine Latino supermarkets as food-based themescapes of Latino culture and politics, which at once structure networks within and beyond Latino communities and attract public and governmental scrutiny, thus becoming unstable and vulnerable landscapes of community, citizenship, and cultural identity. Throughout the report, I use the term "themescape" to describe an extended and fluid themed environment that includes symbolic or ideological motifs whose implications transcend the physical contours of space, often extending into

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[4] Joe Rodriguez, "Mi Pueblo's Loyal Customers Can't Believe Iconic Latino Supermarket Would Go Under." *San Jose Mercury News,* July 2nd, 2013.
[5] "Boycott Mi Pueblo Food Center", YouTube Video, 15:09, posted by "Dhukkaboy," November 22nd, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMuinNP8jRg
[6] Patrick May, "Grocery Chain Mi Pueblo Comes Out of Bankruptcy Protection." *San Jose Mercury News,* June 5th, 2014.

broader everyday life.[7] Mi Pueblo represents just one example of the ways in which Latino businesses and communities have been systematically targeted by neoliberal state policies that discursively seem to support progressive immigration policies and inclusion while ultimately impeding possibilities for growth and stability. These policies produce a migration experience in which culture and community collide with a narrative that celebrates immigrant success and cultural resilience but is grounded in structures of inequality. In food, patterns of consumption and labor intersect, and the Latino supermarket becomes a stage for politics of consumption, cultural preservation, and reform, wherein citizenship, labor, and food become problematically intertwined. Mi Pueblo thus offers both a utopian sanctuary of culture and community and an unstable and fraught landscape for undocumented workers.

Throughout this paper, I will consider the ways in which the best intentions behind minority coalition-building can result in the erasure of more specific histories that become determining factors in the material manifestations of state policies. The Mi Pueblo administration and the DRC at first glance seem to represent broader clashing beliefs about what Latino cultural and political unity should look like. Yet, both groups present visions of Latino futurity that draw from real, imagined, and sometimes idealized Latino histories. However, while each narrative includes a grassroots origin story that celebrates the Latino working class, each end up imbricated in social, political, and economic structures that situate them as oppositional to one another. Though the Mi

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[7] Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 5.

Pueblo administration outwardly crafted a seemingly progressive ideal of cultural preservation and Latino community-building, the store's employees were subject to state immigration and labor policies that often stifled these aims. Arlene Dávila has described this narrative of "latinidad," or constructed Latino cultural and political unity, as the "Latino spin," that is, "the selective dominance" of marketable Latino/a representations, which in turn erase lived experiences of Latinos/as.[8] Meanwhile, the DRC demonstrated an inclusive, pan-ethnic conception of latinidad similar to what Augustin Lao-Montes has described as "latinization from below."[9] In this process, expressive culture and political organizing become tools of self-definition, which is often extended to include the working class and the immigrant communities, thus supporting the collective empowerment of historically marginalized groups.

The complex layering of state policies, consumption and labor practices, migration histories and lived experiences, and at times competing notions of latinidad implicated in the case of Mi Pueblo situate the stores within a pervasive network of what migration scholar Nicholas DeGenova has called "border performances" – surveillance acts or technologies that directly or indirectly police citizenship at sites away from the physical border.[10] According to ICE's website, E-Verify, the software used to implement the "silent raids," is currently used at over 1.9 million hiring sites and is joined by about

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[8] Arlene Dàvila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
[9] Augustin Lao-Montes, *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 17-18.
[10] Nicholas DeGenova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2, (2004): 160-185.

1,400 new companies per week.[11] As such, looking to Mi Pueblo may help better understand an already widely implemented and ever-expanding method of border performances. As a "silent" technology, E-Verify gathers force from the fact that it serves as both a deterrent to undocumented individuals seeking employment and as a means of surreptitiously identifying already hired undocumented workers, who are then made vulnerable to losing their jobs or being deported, since E-Verify transmits information about an individual's citizenship status both to the employer and directly to ICE. Though Mi Pueblo is just one site among the nearly two million that have adopted E-Verify, the dialogues that emerged from the local community's contestation of its adoption provides a telling look into the ways in which E-Verify and other "border performances" impede and destabilize Latino communities, such that various actors and government arms become complicit in the reproduction of neoliberal landscapes of culture and community. The "silence" of the "silent raid" provides a compelling lens through which to understand the ways in which the threat of deportability circulates on an often tacit level, permeating many if not all aspects of everyday life.

This report is comprised of three sections, which will contextualize each moment of this story within broader Latino cultural and political frameworks. In the first section, I will discuss the ways in which the food and décor of Mi Pueblo, combined with Chavez's personal history, contributed to the development of a themescape of latinidad tempered by neoliberalism. In the second part of the paper, as I discuss Mi Pueblo's adoption of E-

[11] "What is E-Verify?," Immigration and Customs Enforcement Website, https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/what-e-verify (accessed March 19, 2016).

Verify and its subsequent bankruptcy, I will contextualize this moment within a history of state and federal policies and more broadly consider the implications of E-Verify as a "border performance." In the final section, I will examine the dialogue that emerged from the context of the "silent raids" between the Mi Pueblo administration and the protestors, paying close attention to the development of two diverging narratives of latinidad, which at once opposed and reinforced one another.

In order to better interpret Mi Pueblo's role in its community, the questions that the silent raids raised, and the discourses of latinidad at play, I will draw from an archive of local media coverage from 2006 through 2015, including newspapers, industry journals, activist blogs, and YouTube footage of the store and protests. Other primary sources will include ephemera from the protests such as flyers, placards, and snapshots, as well as the California state policy documents that underpinned the store's labor and immigration conflicts. Finally, I will consider the design of the store itself as well as its food as "texts" which can be close-read in order to better understand the narratives at play.

In this case study, my intention is not to depict Chavez as the greedy profiteer solely responsible for betraying his community, nor the protestors as naïve and uninformed rabble-rousers, but rather to discuss the ways in which both groups find themselves struggling with tensions between a discourse that gestures toward democratic access and equal citizenship rights for Latinos/as but, through governmental policy, withholds possibilities for true mobility. This story thus shows how Latino groups across the political spectrum confront the outcomes of the double-bind that is so often endemic

to Latino success, caused by a circulating "Latino threat" narrative that produces social political, and economic anxieties among those invested in preserving white supremacy.[12] At the heart of this case study, the supermarket becomes a site in which to examine tensions surrounding questions of Latino access, belonging, citizenship, and cultural identity.

[12] Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Theming Mi Pueblo

Mi Pueblo's nineteen stores span the vertical length of California's Bay Area and Central Coast, with the northernmost outlet in San Rafael, the seat of Marin County, an affluent suburb of San Francisco, and the southernmost in Salinas, a small working-class, agricultural city home to a high population of farm workers. In some ways, these two border sites capture the breadth of the Latino landscape in the region. In San Rafael, Latinos made up 30% of the population, with about half the population of Mexican origin and the other half from Central America, and a median household income of $75,700 in 2010. In Salinas, Latinos/as represent 75% of the population, with 70% of Mexican origin and a median household income of $49,7000. In East Oakland, the site of the 2012 protests, Latinos/as represented 50% of the population, with a median household income of $39, 601. All of the Mi Pueblo outlets are located in zip codes with at least a 25% Latino population, and four different sites serve East San Jose (60% Latino), where the franchise was founded. [13]

Almost all of the nineteen Mi Pueblo stores are sited in densely populated residential or urban areas. Many are easily recognizable by their shared bright yellow and red façade, rendered in an approximated, big-box version of Mission Revival. Inside, each store is themed for a different Mexican state, and is suggestive of a village marketplace executed in a cartoon aesthetic. As in many supermarkets, each store is divided into butcher, bakery, produce, dairy, and dry goods sections, but at Mi Pueblo

[13] "American Factfinder," USCensus.gov, http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml# (accessed March 11, 2016).

each is housed in a smaller "building" complete with tiled roofs, doors, windows, shutters, flower boxes, and balconies, all with a rustic, rough-hewn wood finish. The bright floor tiles, colorful streamers, and loud ranchera music provide a festive atmosphere that draws the customer in. There is also a dining area, decorated with murals depicting everyday life specific to each state, where shoppers and their families dine and socialize throughout the day. While Mi Pueblo primarily serves Latino customers, its extensive theming, affordable prices, and selection of products attract a wide array of customers to its doors.

The supermarket trip is a physical and temporal touchstone in the American week, often part of a pattern or routine of everyday life that inevitably leaves an imprint on the consumer's worldview. Mi Pueblo, with its abundant theming, both heightens the shopper's experience and familiarizes it, such that the market comes to represent an alternate home space, and, particularly for Latino/a shoppers, an interface to their country of origin. As discourses of home and family circulate through, into, and out of the store's physical space, embedded in food or in labor, the consumer becomes enmeshed in a social and political web with local and transnational ties. For many U.S. Latino/as, this web offers an important system of support and cultural preservation, but, as we will see in the next section, this web can come to ensnare undocumented workers and their families, with uncertain implications for broader Latino life.

Hailed as "a study in capitalizing on America's growing Latino population," Mi Pueblo's initial commercial and popular success is bound up with its effective use of

theming and food to appeal to both Latino and crossover markets.[14] Though owner Juvenal Chavez opened his first store in 1991, in this section I will primarily consider sources from the peak of the franchise's success in the years leading up to E-Verify and the subsequent bankruptcy, from about 2005 to 2011, when the stores were at their most profitable and were most celebrated in the local media. This period also coincides with the emergence of some of the most fraught and publicly contested immigration policies in recent history, for example 2010's Arizona SB 1070, which sanctioned racial profiling policies comparable to those that would later impact Mi Pueblo. In these years, the imbrication in the media of Chavez's personal biography, the store's use of theming, its success in crossover markets, and its relationship to food sovereignty placed Mi Pueblo's story within a model minority narrative that strategically situated the franchise within a broader context of neoliberalism, while maintaining a tenuous and uncertain relationship to undocumented communities.

Chavez's personal biography has become an important founding narrative for the franchise, and has been well publicized in both local media and trade publications. Many articles praise his innovation, authenticity, and tenacity, to which he credits his meteoric rise from undocumented janitor at Stanford in 1984 to U.S. citizen and owner of a nineteen-store, 300 million dollar franchise in 2010.[15] In interviews and promotional materials for the stores, Chavez seems confident, at ease, and avuncular, often describing his employees as his family and highlighting his investment in his customers' happiness

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[14] Stacy Finz, "Mi Pueblo Food Centers Success Story for Immigrant". *San Francisco Chronicle,* June 12th, 2011.

[15] Sarah Duxbury, "Mi Pueblo Bags $300M in Revenue". *San Francisco Business Times, J*uly 15th, 2010.

and sense of belonging. In his self-representation, Chavez easily negotiates the rhetorical terrain of the American Dream narrative, in one Telemundo interview calling Mi Pueblo "el producto de mis sueños," a far cry from his childhood on a farm in rural Mexico.[16] His discourse is at once humble and full of determination: in 2011, two years before Mi Pueblo's bankruptcy, he told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "I'm not afraid to take risks […] But as aggressive as I am, I'm also conservative […] I never knew I had the ability to lead people […my goal is] to continue growing until I die."[17]

Within a neoliberal ethos, Chavez's entrepreneurial aggressiveness is permissible because it is tempered with humility and conservatism— in his self-narration Chavez positions himself as a benevolent patriarch to his employees and customers, falling easily into a model minority narrative that celebrates working Latino fathers. However, this narrative bears a complex relationship to the realities of everyday immigrant life: by emphasizing his personal qualities, he contributes to a neoliberal tradition that masks the influences of global capital and structural inequality.[18] Chavez's espousal of this model minority narrative and embrace of a "conservative" ethos thus inherently condemns the "radicalism" of his pro-union employees. His biography therefore provides both a foundation and a façade for the subsequent narratives of citizenship, consumerism, and cultural identity that emerge from Mi Pueblo's social and physical space: while it ostensibly supports possibilities for Latino social mobility, it also serves as a normative

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[16] Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, "Juvenal Chavez- Mi Pueblo," YouTube Video, 1:00, March 9th, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzE3eriucVQ

[17] Stacy Finz, "Mi Pueblo Food Centers Success Story for Immigrant". *San Francisco Chronicle,* June 12th, 2011.

[18] Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 133-134.

force, urging new immigrant families toward a conservative political model that ultimately provides an unstable social foundation for Latino communities.

Another important rhetorical strategy in Chavez's self-narration is his tendency to attribute his own success as a businessman and entrepreneur to the food that he sells, represented as a universal and unquestionably moral vehicle of latinidad. Chavez locates food at the social and ethical heart of everyday Latino life, explaining, "food is the key [to cultural preservation]. All the things our parents taught us were done around the table or in the kitchen."[19] Mi Pueblo's guidelines for authenticity extend not only to the Mexican brands stocked in the store but also to the produce, which, as one news article contends, is "grown exclusively south of the border."[20] This model of sourcing is used among other large Latino grocery chains in the U.S., which often maintain direct trade relationships with agricultural or livestock companies in Mexico who are then sustained exclusively by the U.S. Latino grocery industry.

This policy represents a curious antidote to the Bay Area's general enthusiasm for locally sourced produce, an administrative consumer politics internal to Mi Pueblo that maintains not only notable economic ties to Mexico, but also a more abstract investment in the cultural potential of Mexican-grown produce. From the perspective of the store owner, these types of trade agreements allow the business to continue to benefit from relationships and agreements forged in Mexico, while offering the customer the opportunity to engage in transnational and often nostalgic forms of consumption. The

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[19] Stacy Finz, "Mi Pueblo Food Centers Success Story for Immigrant". *San Francisco Chronicle,* June 12th, 2011.
[20] Ibid.

policy seems to propose an alternate "local," which here has little to do with investing in mostly white, small-scale organic farmers, but rather seeks to somehow resituate a sense of Latino localism within the space of the Bay Area. Here, food becomes a mediator between place and body and serves to anchor experience, identity, and memory. In this narrative, Mexican soil itself becomes imbued with cultural properties, which are then, through the medium of the nopales or the chiles sold in the United States, assimilated into expatriated Mexican and Latino/a bodies. Agricultural origin thus becomes increasingly important in the context of migration and globalization, wherein identity and origin become dislocated.

Many local news articles about the food at Mi Pueblo celebrate the "exoticism" of its food selection as a sign of its authenticity. Supplying "culturally iconic goods from habanero plants to piñatas,"[21] and "products not found in standard markets […] uncooked and cooked octopus, beef cheeks, offal, and almost every part of the pig,"[22] the store is often heralded as a source for unusual or hard-to-find products that attract both Latino and crossover customers. For Latino/a shoppers, familiarity with these foods is often understood to imply a sense of ethnic pride and progressive willingness towards cultural preservation and anti-assimilation, while for crossover customers, an interest in Latino foods indicates of a form of cultural capital in which an investment in multiculturalism also stands in for progressivism: in both instances, shoppers participate in forms of consumer citizenship in which consumer choices come to stand in for political values.

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[21] Joe Rodriguez, "Mi Pueblo's Loyal Customers Can't Believe Iconic Latino Supermarket Would Go Under." *San Jose Mercury News,* July 2th, 2013.
[22] Lynn Char Bennett, "Bargain Bite: Mi Pueblo." *San Francisco Chronicle,* February 21st, 2008.

In the discourse surrounding the store's food, authenticity is often associated with both an abundance of choices and with "specificity," yet it is a specificity whose value seems to extend to a wide range of Latino/a customers. Chavez describes his approach as follows:

> Hispanic customers are very demanding—very specific about what they put on the table […] It was a perception in the past that the Hispanic customer did not have the same level of expectation as mainstream shoppers, and for that reason, no one was offering a selection specific to those customers. We come from the same culture, the same taste for food. We haven't had to invent ourselves with the help of consultants.[23]

In this quotation, Chavez rejects the corporate connotations of consultants and strategies, instead presenting his knowledge of food and of his customer's needs as innate and culturally inherent. By emphasizing the ways in which his business knowledge derives from an intrinsic and natural appreciation for morally and culturally uplifting food that, as he posits, is shared among a broad Latino client-base, he diverts attention from the other, perhaps more significant factors that have made his business successful. The focus on food and thus on cultural preservation and family grants the stores with a sense of moral immunity, and food then becomes a decoy that obscures the processes of global capital and problematic labor policies that facilitate Mi Pueblo's success.

Time and again, Chavez ultimately locates the store's success in its food, which is often imbricated in a narrative of cultural values and kinship. In 2009, he claimed:

> I could shut down our full-service meat departments and offer [case-ready] meat instead, and still have the same décor, the same music, and the same environment. But I know the customer wouldn't shop here […] They come to our service

[23] Matthew Enis, "Mi Pueblo Succeeding with Crossover Shoppers." *Supermarket News,* January 11th, 2009.

> departments not just to pick up a piece of meat or a piece of cheese […] It's a sense of nostalgia and connectivity. They feel at home.[24]

Many customer testimonials seem to agree with this narrative, implying that the store provides a sanctuary from the pressures of everyday minority life in the United States. Many mention food as an affective channel between the United States and their home community: "all of the ingredients for [Colon's] northern Mexican kitchen are here, like the green chiles she bought for that night's enchilada dinner, and the milk-and-pecan ice cream bars her two kids devoured in the checkout line."[25] Mi Pueblo transplants a sense of nostalgia for Mexican village life into its physical infrastructure and eventually into U.S. Latino homes.

The "connectivity" mentioned by Chavez refers not only to an affective and nostalgic link between the US and Mexico, but also between and among members of the Bay Area Latino community. The franchise sponsors numerous programs intended to foster a sense of cultural preservation and community uplift, including voter registration events hosted by local celebrities including popular radio host El Cucuy, cultural celebrations, college scholarship competitions, a radio program, and remittance services.[26] These programs extend Mi Pueblo's services beyond those typically provided in U.S. supermarkets, thus the network of markets becomes an interface for both local and transnational Latino communities. Chavez has also been celebrated for opening a

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[24] Matthew Enis, "Mi Pueblo Succeeding with Crossover Shoppers." *Supermarket News,* January 11th, 2009.

[25] Joe Rodriguez, "Mi Pueblo's Loyal Customers Can't Believe Iconic Latino Supermarket Would Go Under." *San Jose Mercury News,* July 2th, 2013.

[26] Tyche Hendricks, "Popular DJ Takes Registration Drive to Latino Voters." *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 1st, 2006, and Mi Pueblo Website, www.mipueblofoods.com/ (accessed March 25, 2015).

branch in East Palo Alto, a majority Latino neighborhood previously considered a "food desert"—an area underserved by a major grocery store, making affordable fresh produce and healthy foods inaccessible to residents.[27] Thus, for many Latinos/as, the network of Mi Pueblo stores offers an opportunity to carve out social, political, and cultural space for Latinos in the United States, transplanting the familiar into the unfamiliar.

While Mi Pueblo often provides an important resource to many Latino/a shoppers, the store's theming and Chavez's discursive consolidation of a single "Hispanic customer" also flattens the Latino cultural and culinary landscape. Even he acknowledges the prescriptive nature of the Mi Pueblo consumer experience: "with my own Latino customers [I am] teaching the customer to become a customer,"[28] a process of activating a consumer identity that is at once active and passive.[29] While an initial self-recognition draws Latino customers to the store, its theming provides, through the food, design, and music, a model of latinidad that comes to project a singular U.S. Latino experience and culture. The prescriptive process of molding Latino/a consumers, initiated in the Mi Pueblo stores, is permeable to everyday Latino life, ultimately extending beyond the walls of the supermarket and circulating in political and social narratives that come to define individual experiences.

Meanwhile, for non-Latino/a customers, the low prices and specialty food selection, combined with the theming, are a draw: by one article's account "Bob

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[27] Betsy Schiffman, "East Palo Alto May Get First Real Supermarket." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 6th, 2009.
[28] Matthew Enis, "Mi Pueblo Succeeding with Crossover Shoppers." *Supermarket News,* January 11th, 2009.
[29] Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 6.

Reynolds, a Moraga grocery business consultant, often takes his clients to the Mi Pueblo store in nearby Pittsburg. 'It's the colors, it's the decorations, it's the music […] It's a really fun place to shop. It's an ethnic experience to go in there.'"[30] The theming of the store creates a sense of excitement and "ethnic experience" that distinguishes Mi Pueblo from a mainstream grocery experience, and at the same time shapes a public perception that draws from longstanding symbols and short-hands for Mexican culture: in a crossover customer testimonial on YouTube, one shopper, who cites the store's low prices as its greatest asset, exclaims: "they've got every damn thing you'd want up in here. It's like the Latino version of a Super Wal-Mart! The people in here are so nice and it's clean. Look at that produce—nice and full."[31] This customer's comments echo tropes frequently mentioned in reviews of the store, which seek at once to analogize it to familiar U.S. business models (in this case Wal-Mart), praise its vast range of offerings, and most of all, appreciate the "fun" that comes from theming. The video is jokingly sub-captioned "watch out Wal-Mart," as if Mi Pueblo's appeal posited a competitive threat to Wal-Mart's business.

However, this joke in turn becomes an unwitting and compelling testament to Mi Pueblo's participation in the same structures to which a business like Wal-Mart can credit its success. Bethany Moreton has aptly identified the "paradox" of Wal-Mart: that it is able to project a small business ethos within a big-business corporate structure. Like Mi

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[30] Dan Nakaso, "Mi Pueblo Grocery Store Says It Might Have to Liquidate." *San Jose Mercury News,* April 17th, 2014.

[31] "My visit to Mi Pueblo food center," YouTube Video, 2:33, posted by "RichGard1," October 13th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEH0EcjDIZA.

Pueblo, in its earliest days Wal-Mart was extensively themed (around Ozarks culture and its founder, Sam Walton), rigorous in its development of its corporate culture, affordably priced, and famously anti-union. Moreton partially attributes its success to modern conditions of mobility, which make themescapes of small town life even more appealing to a nostalgic and perhaps even homesick client base. With the chain's expansion, Moreton notes the development of an "ephemeral community" around the store, a notion that I would like to extend to my reading of the network of Mi Pueblo stores.[32] While there is indeed a broad, fluid, and permeable sense of community that emerges from Mi Pueblo's production of latinidad, its foundations are inherently unstable, insecure, and ephemeral.

[32] Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Silent Raids

Criticism of Mi Pueblo during the 2012 protests often centered upon Juvenal Chavez, who was frequently depicted as responsible for both shaping and breaking the sense of sanctuary provided by the stores. Many critics of Chavez's decision to adopt E-Verify in the fall of 2012 quickly engage in a discourse of "betrayal," "hypocrisy," and "traitorousness," noting the ways in which the program comes across as ironically hostile to undocumented communities, especially given Chavez's personal history and the values apparently embedded in the Mi Pueblo themescape. As United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) organizing director Gerardo Dominguez told the *Marin Independent Journal* in October 2012,

> Mi Pueblo is a traitor. When you have customers and workers who are recent immigrants from Latin America and Mexico, by checking the immigration status of prospective employees what are you telling your community? You can't give me a job, but you want my dollars?[33]

Following in this vein, many reactions include a sense of incredulity at Chavez's apparent hypocrisy and ruthlessness towards his supposedly beloved employees. The protestors' frequent rallying cry of "Juvenal Chavez no es del Pueblo" highlights the ways in which they perceived Chavez to have alienated himself both from his people, his town, and his community, thus depicting him as implicitly anti-Mexican. However, this tendency to target Chavez as the sole perpetrator of this injustice at times obscures the broader forces at play.

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[33] AP, "Union Leads Consumer Boycott Against Mi Pueblo". *Marin Independent Journal,* October 29th, 2012.

The 2012 "silent raids" were mandatory— according to company spokespeople enforced under circumstances of "tremendous pressure" from the Department of Homeland Security— but their outcomes also revealed the extent of Mi Pueblo's anti-union policies and undocumented, underpaid workforce.[34] While these policies internal to Mi Pueblo exacerbated the consequences of the subsequent "silent raids," I would like to suggest that it may be productive to think more expansively about the ways in which these "raids" did not occur in isolation, but rather as the result of larger racist and xenophobic political, social, and economic structures and border performances that contribute to a process of ensuring that immigrant workers are relegated to social and economic margins.[35] The ideological implications of the term "silent raid" provide a useful heuristic for thinking about how various political and economic forces insidiously pervade Latino community spaces, often under the guise of progressivism. The development of the "traitor" narrative surrounding Mi Pueblo, with its nationalistic connotations, at once obscured the broader tensions supporting Mi Pueblo's policies and sowed the seeds for the development of opposing blocs of socially responsible latinidad during the 2012 protests.

First, it may help to clarify E-Verify's history and policy. First introduced in 1997, E-Verify was made mandatory in states with historically conservative immigration policies, including Arizona, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. While E-Verify

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[34] Lee Romney, "Supermarket Chain that Joined E-Verify Part of Immigration Probe." *Los Angeles Times,* October 6th, 2012.
[35] Hector Amaya, *Citizenship Excess: Latino/as, Media, and the Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

was never mandatory for private businesses in California, municipalities could mandate it, a policy that was particularly prevalent in border counties. However, Mi Pueblo's decision to implement E-Verify came on the heels of California's Assembly Bill 1236, passed September 6th, 2011, which prohibited municipalities from mandating E-Verify in private businesses. The language of the policy reads as follows:

> The E-Verify Program of the United States Department of Homeland Security, in partnership with the United States Social Security Administration, enables participating employers to use the program, **on a voluntary basis**, to verify that the employees they hire are authorized to work in the United States. The bill would prohibit the state, or a city, county, city and county, or special district, from requiring an employer other than one of those government entities to use an electronic employment verification system **except when required by federal law or as a condition of receiving federal funds**.[36] (Emphasis my own.)

At first glance, this bill could be understood as supporting a progressive interest in protecting California's undocumented workers from deportation. However, as the policy delves into further details surrounding the decision, it cites the high operating costs (attributed to additional training and work time and technology costs) incurred by the program as a major disadvantage, particularly during 2011's recession economy. Section 1.C. more broadly refers to "societal costs " incurred by the program: "mandatory use of an electronic employment verification program would increase the costs of doing business in a difficult economic climate. The United States Chamber of Commerce estimates that the net societal cost of all federal contractors using the E-Verify Program would amount to $10 billion a year, federally", thus implying the economy's heavy reliance on undocumented labor. Therefore, looking closely at the language of AB 1236

[36] "CA AB 1236," California State Legislature Web Page, http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_1201-1250/ab_1236_bill_20110909_enrolled.html (accessed March 25, 2015).

reveals that the ostensibly progressive motion not to mandate E-Verify was in fact acting with an interest in protecting employers' ability to undervalue and underpay undocumented workers in order to support an economic paradigm in which fair wages for all is subliminally framed as unattainable.

Mi Pueblo was not alone among Latino supermarkets in its decision to adopt and retain E-Verify, perhaps due to ICE increasingly targeting large Latino retailers in the wake of a 2009 policy shift intended to ease deportation policy by instead punishing companies that hired undocumented workers.[37] According to the *LA Times*, ICE auditors had been known to use E-Verify adoption as a "bargaining chip, with an employer signing up as part of an informal agreement to ease potential penalties."[38] Two comparable chains in Southern California, Vallarta Supermarkets and Northgate Gonzalez Markets, each with 29 stores, also adopted the program, while Arteagas Food Center, an 8-store chain in the Central Valley, did not. Like Mi Pueblo, both Northgate Gonzalez and Vallarta had been under increasing pressure from the UFCW to allow their employees to unionize after firing all employees who attempted to do so. While most supermarket chains are unionized, and therefore employ few if any undocumented workers, these three Latino chains may have strategically adopted anti-union policies in order to hire undocumented workers, following in a pattern of similar labor policies

[37] "Immigration, Strengthening Enforcement," White House Website, https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration/strengthening-enforcement (accessed March 25, 2015).
[38] Lee Romney, "Supermarket Chain that Joined E-Verify Part of Immigration Probe." *Los Angeles Times,* October 6th, 2012.

adopted by historically anti-union corporations[39]. Union advocates often argued that the only way that Mi Pueblo could have evaded the I-9 audit would have been by citing unresolved labor disputes as a cause for delaying the audit, an option that Mi Pueblo management refused to pursue.[40]

Therefore, like many large California employers, Chavez found himself caught in a double bind exacerbated by the preconditions of his labor practices. As a Latino employer of about 3,000 Latino/a employees, his workforce had particularly strong ties to undocumented social and labor networks. Efficiently achieving the "riches" in his foundational rags-to-riches narrative therefore hinged on his keeping business expenses low through underpaid, undocumented labor and anti-union policies. While these policies seem to have backfired during the 2012 "silent raids," in which he lost 80% of his workforce, and during the subsequent 2013 Chapter 11 bankruptcy, Mi Pueblo's eventual $56 million bailout from Chicago-based Victory Park Capital seems to affirm the extent of an overarching interest in protecting mid-size "family run businesses having to battle with behemoths like Target and Wal-Mart," as one *San Jose Mercury News* article framed it, while neglecting to protect these businesses' employees.[41] Chavez, meanwhile, upheld the role of sympathetic patriarch throughout the controversy, during the "silent raids" stating "the possibility of losing one of our employees will hurt my

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[39] Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morgantown: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[40] "The Dignity and Resistance Coalition Challenges Mi Pueblo's Attack on Immigrants," *Indybay* (blog), October 22nd, 2012, https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2012/10/22/18724277.php (accessed March 20, 2015).

[41] Patrick May, "Grocery Chain Mi Pueblo Comes Out of Bankruptcy Protection." *San Jose Mercury News,* June 5th, 2014.

heart […] and it will feel like losing a family member."[42] Post-bankruptcy, Chavez became chairman of the company, while the new CEO, Javier Ramirez, reprised the rhetoric of Chavez's heyday: "the road ahead will not be easy and we know that there is much work to be done, but we have already started to implement aggressive initiatives designed to reposition Mi Pueblo as a profitable entity."[43] Therefore, despite all of these political and economic fluctuations, ultimately Mi Pueblo's viability as a corporate entity was made invincible by a vast and complex network of U.S. institutions invested in preserving it, while individual actors within Mi Pueblo's corporate structure were made increasingly susceptible to continuing patterns of injustice.

This case study helps better understand the implications of E-Verify in producing "silent raids," and the ways in which these raids may be understood through the lens of border scholar Nicholas DeGenova's notion of "performing the border through border spectacles," that is, directly or indirectly policing citizenship and identity at sites away from the physical border.[44] DeGenova's "border spectacles" help illuminate how local and government policies extend the arm of the border into the interior through policies and technologies that monitor undocumented immigrants in public spaces, such as surveillance cameras, security equipment, and the Secure Communities program, which from 2008 to 2014 allowed local law enforcement to conduct immigration raids based on biometric data, which can include physical identifiers such as fingerprints or DNA, in

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[42] Patrick May, "Grocery Chain Mi Pueblo Comes Out of Bankruptcy Protection." *San Jose Mercury News,* June 5th, 2014

[43] Ibid.

[44] Nicholas DeGenova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2, (2004): 160-185.

addition to token-based identification systems such as driver's licenses or passports. Together, these technologies of control create a climate of fear that "*excludes* [rather than locates, detains, or deports] irregular immigrants from key institutions of society, such as the labor and housing market, and even from the informal networks of fellow countrymen and family."[45] As such, the potential elasticity of the borders creates a sense of threat that excludes undocumented immigrants from participation in the institutions and cultural life that make up the community in which they live.

E-Verify is just one node in an extensive network of technologies, government agencies, national and local policies, and everyday human interactions that contribute to this border performance, but I would like to consider the particular conditions and outcomes of the silent, technological performance in terms of broader conceptions of citizenship and belonging. The "efficiency" of E-Verify relies on a layering of databases and credentials designed to "verify," often from birth, the right to inhabit and work in space, including token-based identifications such as "Form I-9 [used to self-report employment eligibility], U.S. passport and visa information, immigration and naturalization records, state-issued driver's licenses and identity document information, Social Security Administration records," and, most recently, identifying photographs.[46] This emphasis on token-based identification thus erases more specific personal and

[45] Dennis Broeders and Godfried Engbersen, "The Fight Against Illegal Migration: Identification Policies and Immigrants' Counterstrategies." *American Behavioral Scientist* 30, no. 12 (2007), 1592.
[46] "How E-Verify Works," USCIS.gov, http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/what-e-verify/how-e-verify-works (accessed October 28, 2015).

national migration histories, thus stifling possibilities for empathy, nuance, and identification.

E-Verify complicates Latino unity because it allows the state to mediate between members of Latino communities, giving some actors the power to audit citizenship and making others vulnerable to being audited. The criticism of Mi Pueblo owner Juvenal Chavez after the audit was predicated on the understanding that he opted into the program, though the extent of his own agency in the audit is ambiguous. Indeed, Chavez, along with many other Latino business owners, found his role to be bound up in the material contradictions of his specific historical moment."[47] Chavez was institutionally empowered by his rags-to-riches personal history that fit well into a celebrated model minority narrative, a discourse of employees-as-family that mimicked patriarchal corporate and community models, and a narrative of community-building through cultural events and "authentic" food and décor that appealed to the region's progressive, multicultural worldview. At the same time, the "material conditions of his specific historical moment," in this case the state economy's dependence on undocumented labor and its protection of underpaid labor, combined with its hostility towards Latino businesses and undocumented immigrants, situated him in a position of disempowerment which left him few options in terms of his decision to cooperate with ICE.

It is also crucial to consider the relationship between technology and individuals, especially the ways in which it can dislocate or obscure individual agency

[47] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 67.

and action. In this specific case study, technology adds an additional layer of abstraction of the individual that further complicates his or her role, in which accountability is diffused by the materiality of the technology at hand. While Chavez's decisions were centralized in the media, the software designer who created E-Verify, the ICE administrator who mandated the audit, the HR manager who ran the employee documents through E-Verify, and the ICE agent who followed up on the audit's results are all implicated in this story. The software itself and the simple click of a button that subjects an individual's social and political stability to a matrix of verifying token-based identifications engenders an outcome that is in some ways immediate and in others remote. Since most results are provided immediately or within 24 hours, the administrator responsible for E-Verify is confronted with the immediate possibility of having to terminate an undocumented employee, yet the more serious implications of the possible deportation or detainment of that individual is left to ICE. E-Verify as an agency provides an option for an even more significant degree of detachment, in which an audit may be outsourced to a specialized agent whose sole responsibility is running the audit on behalf of an employer, thus distancing immediate responsibility from anyone involved in the day to day dynamics of the workplace. Thus, the fact that numerous actors and technologies mediated and diffused the border spectacle of E-Verify produced the silence that characterized the way in which the raid materialized, that is, without an obvious perpetrator beyond Chavez himself and without immediately visible outcomes. The protestors' decision to center Chavez's complicity in the audit reflects an understandable

impulse to fill the voids of inherent in this network of responsibility, yet also distracted from the broader structures that framed his decisions.

As such, the "silence" inherent to the E-Verify raid complicates the ways in which the various Latino/a actors in this case study may understand themselves as agents. For Chavez and other Mi Pueblo administrators, E-Verify provided a sense of false agency that also led to a perhaps false, or at least misleading, sense of his culpability. The material conditions of the technology itself and the structural forces that engendered it thus obscured his ability to suppress the audit. Meanwhile, this same technology denied undocumented individuals the ability to self-narrate, rather it forced them into categories (with very material implications) based on a matrix of token-based identifiers.

Reading E-Verify as a technology that both obstructs and produces new forms of nation, ethnic community, and identity reveals the extent to which the "silence" of the raids in many ways enhanced their efficiency. The infrastructure of the software itself, contextualized by the authority of the state, leaves little room for the intervention of narratives that would help complicate and perhaps disrupt the presuppositions inherent to its logic. Perhaps the most powerful effect of E-Verify and similar policies and technologies is their ability to inhibit narratives that would allow conversations and identifications to occur that might in turn ease hostilities between groups. In the case of Mi Pueblo, we may observe this stifling of narrative for all parties involved, not only those most materially affected. In one sense, Chavez's ability to transcend the socially implied limits of his minority category demonstrate the ways in which minority communities are increasingly destabilizing traditional power structures. At the same time,

his ultimate complicity with ICE, in which his non-dissent may be read as an additional form of silence that is detrimental to another faction of his community, indicates that the material conditions at play continue to obstruct possibilities for true reform.

Latinization from Above, Latinization from Below

The perspectives and demands of the 2012 protestors show how they used the E-Verify controversy to frame an alternate conception of latinidad within and against this paradigm. The "silent raid" in many ways served as a catalyst for garnering further support for a longstanding UFCW campaign against Mi Pueblo, which had also included a 2011 hunger strike in reaction to low wages, firings of pro-union employees, and poor working conditions. Considering two flyers circulating during the 2012 protests, one created by the Dignity and Resistance Coalition (DRC)[48], made up of a number of local union organizing and activist groups, and the other by the Mi Pueblo management[49], reveals the tensions in the competing notions of latinidad promoted by each organization: the DRC appeals to a leftist tradition of Latino social-justice and activism, while Mi Pueblo appeals to aims of social uplift and family values.

[48] Illustration 2: Dignity and Resistance Coalition Flyer. Collected by Perry Bellow-Handelman and Alexander Mejia, October 20th and November 21st, 2012. "ClassRoom Struggle" Database.

[49] Illustration 3: Two sides of a Mi Pueblo Flyer. Collected by Perry Bellow-Handelman and Alexander Mejia, October 20th and November 21st, 2012. "ClassRoom Struggle" Database.

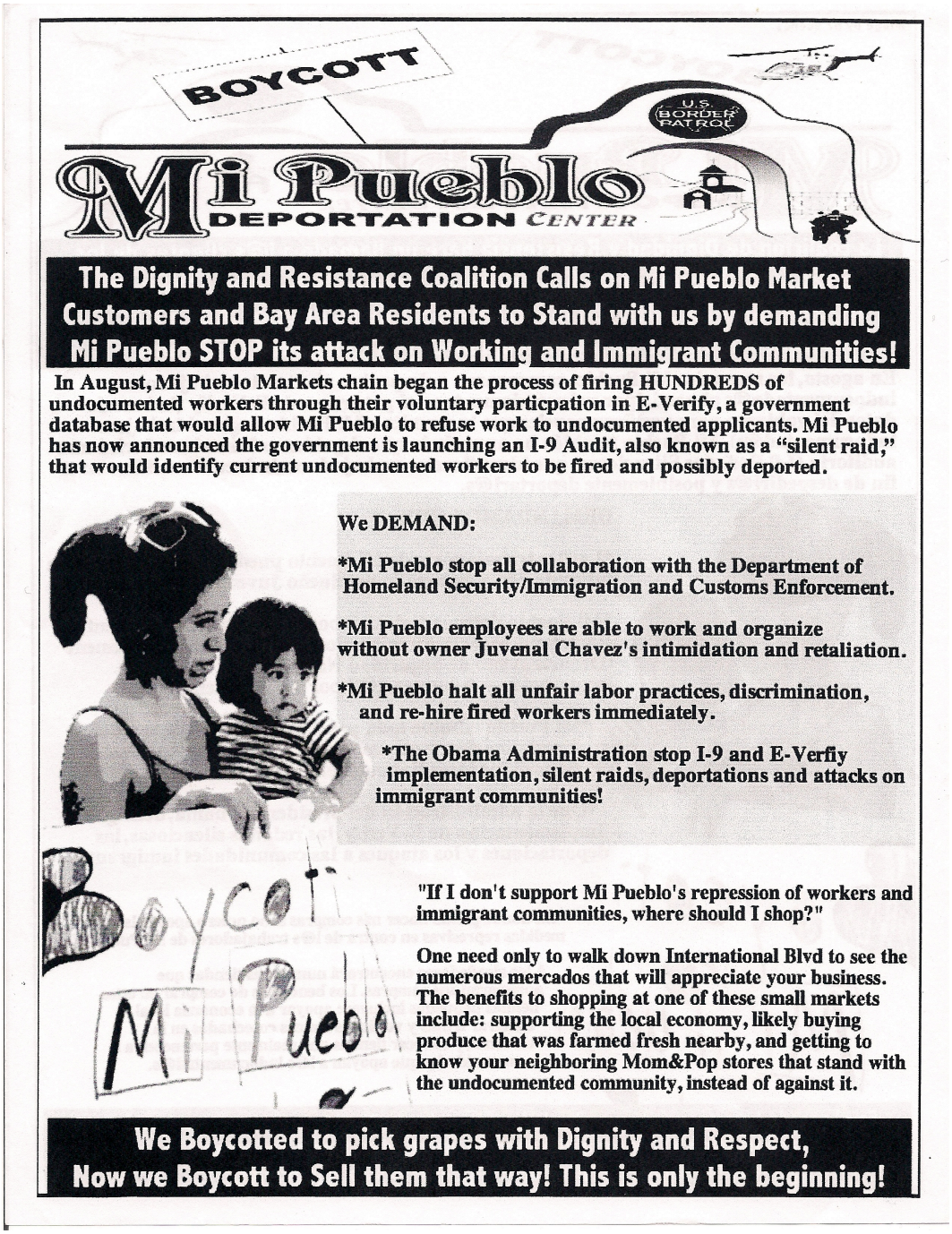

Illustration 2: Dignity and Resistance Coalition Flyer. October 20th, 2012.

Illustration 3: Two sides of a Mi Pueblo Flyer. October 20th, 2012.

Visually, the two flyers echo one another: the DRC flyer parodies the letterhead and style guidelines of Mi Pueblo. On the DRC flyer, the Mi Pueblo letterhead is adjusted such that it reads "Mi Pueblo Deportation Center" (replacing "food" with "deportation," security with instability), and the Mi Pueblo insignia over the adobe archway in the logo is replaced with that of the U.S. Border Patrol. The nostalgic archway is thus reimagined as an unwelcome passage back into Mexico rather than as a comforting reminder of home and heritage, and the market is reconfigured as a site of imprisonment rather than as a hub of community life.

The photographs included in each of the flyers suggest a shared interest in the protection of Latino families and communities, but each project different representations

of Mi Pueblo's influence on everyday Latino life. On the DRC flyer, a mother and toddler stand behind a hand-written sign reading "Boycott Mi Pueblo." Their eyes do not meet the camera; instead they look together towards the right with expressions of apprehension, perhaps suggesting the uncertain futures of Latino families in light of increasingly stringent immigration policies, many of which threaten to disrupt immigrant families. The Mi Pueblo flyer includes three photographs that seem to suggest vitality and unity among Mi Pueblo workers and communities. In the first, dancers perform a traditional ballet folklórico outside Mi Pueblo, thus depicting the store as a site of cultural preservation. The second and third photos show employees looking content and satisfied on the job: in both photos employees face the camera full-on, and in the second a number of the employees surround Chavez in a family-like arrangement. In the Mi Pueblo photographs, all of the Latino subjects project confidence and unity, and seem to lack the sense of future insecurity embodied by the mother and child pair in the DRC photo.

Both flyers make similar use of inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" to demonstrate solidarity between and among the organization members and their audience. The DRC flyer outlines a clear opposition between "we" (DRC members and their allies) and ICE, Chavez, "unfair labor practices and discrimination," and the Obama administration's contemporary immigration policies. It also aligns the DRC with historic Latino union organizing campaigns, in particular the 1965-1970 United Farm Worker Grape Boycott ("We boycotted to pick grapes with Dignity and Respect"). Finally, the flyer suggests that protesters instead invest in smaller mercados in the area, with the goal of "supporting the local economy, likely buying produce that was farmed fresh nearby,

and getting to know […] neighborhood Mom and Pop stores that stand with the undocumented community, not against it." These claims associate a small business economy with progressive immigration politics, thus contrasting these values with Mi Pueblo's approach to both business and immigration policy.

Meanwhile, the copy in the Mi Pueblo flyer seems to attempt to repair its relationship to Latino and undocumented communities and present a unified front of employees and management. One side of the flyer makes no mention of ICE or E-Verify, but instead offers a positive image of the store's corporate culture. On this page, the copy repeatedly uses the pronouns "we," "our", and "us," and cites the store's fair wages, investment in local workers and communities, cultural events, scholarships, and training and educational opportunities as evidence of positive relations with the community and between workers and employers. On the reverse side of the flyer, the copy more directly engages with the protests. It begins by presuming its customers' ongoing support, and makes a clear distinction between "the company" (i.e. the management) and "our employees." "The company" seems to ideologically detach itself both from the UFCW and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and implies solidarity with its employees who have "**not** chosen to [unionize under UFCW]," claiming that "unfortunately there is no way to stop [the DHS] audit." Therefore, the flyer serves the purpose of preserving the store's image of political integrity and repudiating the DRC's claims of unfair labor policies, instead projecting culpability onto DHS and the UFCW.

The two flyers circulated amid the protest environment described at the opening of this paper, which, as I mentioned, featured a number of performances of latinidad.

From video footage of the protests, we can see that the protestors in attendance represented a wide range of demographics: young and old, Latino, white, black, and Asian, seemingly of various economic backgrounds, a phenomenon indicative of a Bay Area tradition of organizational support for Leftist causes. However, the lucha libre skit and a second skit explaining why Latino/as who care about undocumented communities should not shop at Mi Pueblo were performed in Spanish, in a style reminiscent of Teatro Campesino, the theater troupe founded in 1965 as part of the cultural branch of the United Farm Workers. This form of latinidad operates in an optimistic and speculative mode, envisioning a new model of Latino/a community that draws from historic activist traditions to build a more inclusive and economically emancipated worldview. By referencing historical boycotts and activist performances, offering a radically inclusive vision of latinidad, opposing big business and imagining alternate economies, and engaging in performance and artistic production, the protestors envisioned new forms of community that could offer economic justice and citizenship rights to new migrants.

Due in part to his own business practices and in part to neoliberal structures, Chavez's project quickly became bound up in a California business economy dependent upon underpaid, undocumented labor, leading him to fall into the double-bind of neoliberal enterprise and therefore to make new corporate decisions and policies that fundamentally destabilized and disrupted undocumented communities. Meanwhile, through performance and demonstrations, the DRC's project remained in an optimistic and speculative mode, presenting a new paradigm that is perhaps unattainable within the

nation's current social, political, and economic structures, yet continues to push at its seams with hope for a more just future.

Conclusion

At the end of a video documenting the October 2012 protests, the cameraman approaches a young Latino couple coming out of Mi Pueblo, their shopping cart loaded, and asks "¿Sabían que el dueño le esta hechando a la imigración a los empleados? [Did you know that the owner is calling immigration on his employees?]," to which they answer "¡Ya no vamos a venir! [We are never coming back!]."[50] On one hand, perhaps the insufficiency of Chavez's response to the silent raid is all that is needed to inform consumer politics, but at the same time this framing of the issue does not reflect the complex processes and networks that produced this outcome. This is what lends this case study its complexity: while much of Chavez's situation can be attributed to what I have described as the double-bind of doing Latino business within a neoliberal political and economic framework, his schizophrenic back and forth between compliance and resistance leaves the extent of his personal responsibility difficult to quantify and qualify. Since the raids, Chavez has made a number of gestures attempting to make amends with the undocumented community: during the audit, he was reported to have offered all undocumented employees renewed employment once they received U.S. citizenship (perhaps a meager offer given the unlikeliness of this occurring), and as recently as April 2015, the Mi Pueblo Salinas store was offering in-store legal clinics featuring pro-bono immigration lawyers.[51]

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[50] "Boycott Mi Pueblo Food Center", YouTube Video, 15:09, posted by "Dhukkaboy," November 22nd, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMuinNP8jRg.

[51] Valentin Mendoza, " Mi Pueblo in Salinas offers free immigration guidance". *The Salinas Californian,* April 2nd, 2015.

The couple's enthusiastic answer to the cameraman's question, juxtaposed with their brimming shopping cart, highlights the tenuousness of developing a countercultural agenda within a landscape of consumerism and capital. Here, the supermarket remains a site in which to confront tensions between discourse and reality, in this case encompassing not only processes of globalization, capitalism, and identity but also the problem of negotiating ethnicity, citizenship, and belonging within an ideological framework that discursively supports Latino/a access but politically impedes it. Within this structure, it becomes difficult to disentangle intentions from actions, ideals from lived realities. Both sides of the E-Verify controversy in many ways find themselves at an impasse caused by the paradox of neoliberalism. As a Latino businessman operating in a neoliberal economy, Chavez became imbricated in its processes to the point that it becomes difficult to qualify his ideological complicity in its program, though it seems that he felt his situation to have arrived at a point of impasse in 2012. The 2012 protestors, on the other hand, remained optimistic but not naïve: while they were aware of the structures that conditioned Chavez's decisions, they continued to seek loopholes and cracks that could open into a more just future for Latino communities. Operating in a speculative mode, they re-envisioned the Mi Pueblo parking lot as a space of artistic production, inclusivity, and social justice. Thus, the California supermarket becomes a stage for untangling and identifying the forces that define everyday Latino/a lived experiences, and, by better understanding them, opening opportunities for optimism, dissent, and resistance.

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